

## Millennium Review

The Millennium Plan Review Committee appointed by Shenango Presbytery Council (November 9, 2010) has met six times since December, 2010. It has reviewed the Millennium Plan of 2000 and discussed developments since its adoption. It consulted with Bruce Stevens and Susan Wonderland from the Synod of the Trinity.

### **Our Theology of the Church – what it means for Shenango Presbytery**

What does the Lord require of us, "...but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8) Jesus further instructed, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...[and] You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37- 39) In addition to those two commandments he has sent us into the world as the Father sent him, instructing us to make disciples and be his witnesses. (John 20:12, Matthew 28:16 – 20, Acts 1:8) We have found the Great Ends of the church (*Book of Order* F-1.0304) to be an important expression of the call which our Lord has laid upon the church.

Shenango Presbytery has affirmed that we are a "supportive community of congregations and ministers" because the emphasis is on our congregations and their teaching elders, not the Presbytery. In like manner, we have affirmed that there is no such thing as an "independent church." Rather the congregation exists in "covenant accountability" to other congregations if it is to be an authentic church. Teaching and ruling elders lead congregations in worship and mission, but they do so in covenant community with other sessions, thus the description of the Presbytery of Shenango: a Council of the Presbyterian Church (USA) where mutual support for our congregations and teaching elders is practiced.

### **The Millennium Plan – 2000**

The Millennium Plan provided the following Mission Statement:

The Presbytery of Shenango is called by God to be a supportive community  
of congregations and ministers.  
Our mission is to preserve and proclaim the truth of God's grace in Jesus Christ by  
Promoting the peace, unity and purity of the Church  
Helping us to grow in spiritual vitality; and  
Empowering us to be partners in God's mission in the world

The Millennium Plan of 2000 focused on the following initiatives:

Strategic Thrust # 1: Developing and Training Leaders

Purpose: To develop and train lay leaders and clergy to lead spiritually vital churches who are partners in God's ministry and mission in today's world.

Strategic Thrust # 2: Communicating and Partnering Networks

Purpose: To stimulate and communicate Gospel excitement and passion through the formation and nurture of partnering networks for ministry and mission in order to preserve and proclaim the truth of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

The Millennium Plan Review Committee affirms the importance of these initiatives set in 2000. Building on them over the past decade, it affirms (among other things):

- the strong role that Leaderfest has played in leadership development
- the strength of the semi-annual Pastors Retreat (with regular attendance of 40+) for leadership development
- the focus on leadership development which has been significantly addressed by the involvement of fifteen churches in the “Partnership for the Missional Church” with Church Innovations and other presbyteries in western Pennsylvania.
- the importance and strength of the Sudan Partnership (and emerging smaller partnerships with churches in the Dominican Republic and Vietnam) as consistent with the Millennium Plan’s directions.

### **After a Decade – where from here?**

The context for the review of the Millennium Plan after a decade brings particular challenges to Shenango Presbytery:

- we anticipate that up to 20 churches will have new pastors during 2011 – 2012
- the PC(USA) is in crisis, not simply because of the removal of the “fidelity and chastity” language from the church’s constitution, but because of the general implosion of “denominationalism” as we have known it
- The church in North America is under great stress, both in terms of its vitality and institutional expression. PC(USA) membership (like that of Shenango Presbytery) has declined more than 50% in recent decades and the economic problems in the United States have directly impacted congregations and their mission

Given this context, the following four items have been identified for attention in building on the past ten years and as a way to address emerging concerns for the future of the churches of Shenango Presbytery:

1. The attention to broader leadership development made ten years ago is a matter of even greater importance today. The Presbytery must foster higher expectations for ruling elders and deacons, commensurate with those placed on teaching elders. Leaderfest has made significant contributions to ruling elder training (along with a variety of other areas), but this must be seen simply as a launching pad on which to raise the bar for session leadership.

Our Partnership with the Sudan and the emerging relationships in the Dominican Republic and Vietnam, will be a vital part of preparing ourselves to lead in this century. It is not possible to be in concert with the Holy Spirit if we do not take into account the dynamic growth in the church in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

- a. Accountability: Committee on Ministry (Leadership Development Team), Committee on Preparation for Ministry, Christian Education
- b. Review Committee monitoring: Ralph Hawkins and Arnie Morris

Possibilities discussed

- i. Build on elder training via Leaderfest to provide video conferencing to several additional sites for regular training; consider a pilot project that will recruit participation by ten churches for one year through a covenant with the ruling and teaching elders.
  - ii. Recruit Pastor Retreat leadership based on learning needs of pastors
  - iii. Board of Pensions provides online resources on leadership training for pastors; consider a pilot project involving a covenant among ten pastors utilizing this resource for one year
  - iv. Continue to develop missional church conversations:
    - 1. Partnership for the Missional Church – Continuing Covenant pastors meeting six times per year
    - 2. Church Innovations has provided “Standing at the CrossRoads” as a process to introduce churches to the missional church through a 6 months process.
    - 3. Participation of several churches in a new Partnership for the Missional Church Cluster in 2013
  - v. Clustering and video-conferencing is an important way to extend the work of Presbytery-wide officer training
2. The 2000 Millennium Plan included a new initiative in communication. This resulted in revamping of the “Shenango Showcase” newsletter, further use of email, a new webpage, and the emergence of eLink (a weekly information email to 300+ subscribers). These steps were critical for the past decade, but it is time to consider the next steps in technological communication. With whom is communication needed in the Presbytery? How can the Presbytery engage these individuals in greater networking? These questions need to be addressed again under the rubric of “social networking.”
- a. Accountability: Task Group on Communication (including Autumn Covert)
  - b. Review Committee monitoring: Pam Courtney and Charlene DeLaCruz

3. New Church Development has never been seriously considered in Shenango Presbytery because we have at least 5 churches within a 10 minute drive of any location in Mercer and Lawrence counties. Word Centered Church is the only new church chartered in more than 100 years, and it was not initiated by any of our churches or the Presbytery. We know from research that growth will only come through starting new churches that reach people who will not easily come to our 68 churches. They must be reached where they are and on their own terms. Our churches need to be encouraged to start new worship sites (which was how many of our congregations were originally formed). This effort should be addressed in the continuing missional church work being done with Church Innovations and the “Partnership for the Missional Church.” A key question in PMC is: “to whom is God sending us?”

- a. Accountability: Evangelism Committee; networking and cultivating
- b. Review Committee monitoring: Glenn Hink, Derek Longbrake, Charlene DeLaCruz

Possibilities discussed

- i. Trinity Church (Mercer) has started a worship service at 6:30 pm on Thursdays
  - ii. First, Sharon is developing plans for a Saturday evening worship service in a coffee house
  - iii. A worship service among Chinese speakers may be emerging in the Grove City area
  - iv. A Spanish language service is held in Wayside Emmanuel Church in Neshannock Township on Sunday evenings. The Hispanic population is still small, but the partnership which the New Wilmington and Glen Moore churches have in the Dominican Republic has raised the question of how those Dominican partners can help us engage Spanish-speaking residents
  - v. The PMC team at Mt. Jackson is developing a second worship site.
  - vi. Pittsburgh Theological Seminary has instituted a Masters of Divinity curriculum in Church Planting for students preparing to start new churches. Hot Metal Bridge, Upper Room and Open Door are New Church Developments in Pittsburgh Presbytery from which we can learn.
4. Community development is needed in our counties after years of stagnation. This should be a concern for the churches of Shenango Presbytery in partnership with members of the community. It should particularly be a concern of our churches on behalf of the poor. The Church and Community Committee has reconstituted itself as a “Self-Development of People Committee” and is positioned to lead us in modest inquiry into this area of engaging the world.
- a. Accountability: Church and Community/Self-Development of People Committee
  - b. Review Committee monitoring: Derek Longbrake and Arnie Morris
- Possibilities discussed
- i. Community Gardens is a plan at First Church, Sharon, in partnership with a local housing project
  - ii. Clusters of churches in a local community should focus on this concern

These four areas are not so much “programs” of the Presbytery. They are areas in which our churches are invited to stimulate, nurture and encourage the Kingdom work of the Triune God through networking and partnering.

It is important to note that the Presbytery’s future will be significantly impacted by succession planning for all staff. This has been a neglected discipline for all church leadership. An important dimension for consideration in staffing is the pressure on the income stream from Presbytery per capita funds. Finances cannot drive the kinds of staffing that is needed, but realistic income projections do set a framework for decisions about the specific work to be assigned to staff. Solid financial projections must be made at least three years into the future. The Personnel Committee and the Budget and Finance Committee will be responsible to give careful attention to this. Review Committee monitoring: Glenn Hink and Tom Gomola

The Millennium Plan Review Committee recommends these four foci and further recommends that the committee members meet with the accountability groups noted, providing further explanation. The Committee would then be asked to meet late in 2012 to review progress and report to the Council.